



Joint News Release
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Department of Providence Parks and Recreation
Partnership for Providence Parks

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November 5, 2013 Providence RI The Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the USFWS Coastal Program are pleased to announce that it has been nationally awarded to receive funding as an Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership Project. “Providence, Rhode Island: Diversity of Wildlife, Lands & Communities Project” is one of only five projects selected nationwide” said Janis Nepshinsky, Visitor Services Manager. “This is exciting, since there were 16 proposals from the northeast region alone, of which, five proposals were selected to then compete with a total of 29 proposals from around the nation,” she also said. The other top four projects funded are the Forest Preserve District (Chicago), Ozark Urban Nature Connection Experience, (Arkansas), Creating Urban Oasis (Connecticut), and Houston Wilderness (Texas).

Creating a growing urban presence and connecting urban youth with nature is an important initiative with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and well as its conservation partners. “I am pleased Rhode Island’s application was chosen for this competitive award and I applaud the Fish and Wildlife Service for its commitment to connecting more kids to nature,” said U.S. Senator Jack Reed, the Chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior & Environment, which oversees federal spending on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service programs. “Providence is a bustling city with a diverse population and a diverse park system. This federal Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership Project funding will help boost recreation and environmental education opportunities for residents, particularly young people.”

This selection is largely due to the project’s innovative collaboration with the Department of Providence Parks and Recreation and the Partnership of Providence Parks in creating a Service urban presence. The Parks Department manages over 100 neighborhoods parks throughout the city. These parks offer a variety of recreational opportunities including serene forested green spaces, playgrounds, ball fields, walking trails, environmental conservancy, interpretive signs, nearby rivers, canoe launches and sailing. Many of these parks also have rivers that run through them or have a forested border. The Park’s nine recreation centers house after school programs, summer learning experiences, and community events throughout the year. “All of the parks are within a half-mile of a school, and many of the parks are on a bus stop or are already used by the schools as recreation and recess areas. These parks are accessible to the city youth and make

great outdoor classrooms creating many opportunities to conduct nature classes and create wildlife habitats right in the neighborhood,” said Beth Charlebois, Director of **Neighborhood Providence Parks and Recreation Services**.

The Partnership of Providence Parks brings together the Providence Parks Department and over 38 Friends groups throughout the city of Providence with the business, non-profits, and schools, who have a strong commitment to the neighborhoods and understand the value of flourishing green spaces in the community. “The Partnership supports residents and community partners in ensuring the public parks are active, vibrant, healthy, playful and unique places. We develop an awareness and appreciation of our parks through conservation and stewardship efforts, and by activating our public green spaces,” said Wendy Nilsson, Executive Director of Partnership for Providence Parks.

The Rhode Island Refuge Complex received \$40,000 for the Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership Project with additional funding from Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Friends of NWRs of Rhode Island and the Complex station funds. Support for this project also comes from knowledgeable staff of The Nature Conservancy, the Roger Williams Park and Zoo, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program, the Audubon Society of Rhode Island, and Save the Bay.

Funds are being used to provide wildlife habitats, nature trails, interpret signs, and to hire the Conservation Program Coordinator, April Alix. April, a former AmeriCorps employee, has several years of experience in Providence urban education and ecology programs and working with Providence Parks partnerships. She has worked with the Providence schools through PASA, the Providence After-School Alliance, and has aided in the development of the EPA funded Schoolyard Science for the Urban Ecosystem program. The Coordinator will support and bridge the various conservation groups working in Providence and serve as a liaison between the Park system, schools, and the Service. “April will also facilitate training for outreach, interpretation, and education programs for wildlife conservation. This will be accomplished by building on existing programs and guides, supporting wildlife interpretation, and carrying out habitat assessment and restoration in selected neighborhood parks, said Janis Nepshinsky.”

The importance of engaging urban youth in the conservation needs of the nation, to gain an appreciation for natural resources through instilling a land ethic, and to recruit a culturally diverse conservation workforce which reflects the nation’s communities as a whole, cannot be understated. Working in collaboration with Providence Parks, the Partnership for Providence Parks, the Mayor’s Office of Healthy Communities, the Roger Williams Park Zoo, and other conservation organizations, we propose to develop and implement an inclusive and cohesive environmental awareness and education program by bringing a conservation message to where they live and work.
